

Interview with Dorinda CHIANG

Transcript

For the Diversifying the Bar: Lawyers Make History Project

Law Society of Upper Canada

Interviewee: Dorinda Chiang

Interviewer: Allison Kirk-Montgomery

Interview Date: 11 October 2012

Location: Toronto, Ontario

Transcribed by Flying Fingers Transcription Services.

[Transcript has been edited by Allison Kirk-Montgomery and sent for review to Dorinda Chiang to correct errors, and to remove repetitions, interruptions, false starts, etc., for improved clarity.]

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

Today is the 11th of October, 2012, and my name is Alison Kirk-Montgomery. On behalf of The Law Society of Upper Canada, I am interviewing Dorinda Chiang, a lawyer, at her offices at McMaster, McIntyre and Smyth.

Dorinda Chiang:

Smyth [pronounced *smaith*].

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

Smyth Law, located at 2777 Dundas Street West in Toronto. Specifically, I am interviewing you, Dorinda, for the Law Society of Upper Canada for a project entitled, "Diversifying the Bar: Lawyers Make History." So good morning!

Dorinda Chiang:

Good morning.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

And I want to thank you, also, for taking part in this project and giving up some time for it too. So I'm going to ask you, first of all, to tell me your full name.

Dorinda Chiang:

Dorinda Lin Chiang. And I do have a Chinese name, Sung Soo Lin. My grandmother, when we were growing up, believed that we should all have a Chinese name. It has different meanings in Cantonese and in Mandarin, and it's actually pronounced differently in Mandarin as well. So I know that in Mandarin it sort of means lily, like a lily flower, a lily root. That's why I have a picture in my office of the lily plant. I'm not sure what it means in Cantonese, something flowering, similar.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

Cantonese, is that the language of your family?

Dorinda Chiang:

That's right. My family is from Southern China in the Delta region. And they speak a dialect, a village dialect. It's not the traditional Cantonese that you may hear, but it's a dialect of that.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

And do they say speak Mandarin as well?

Dorinda Chiang:

No, no.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

This is your parents as well as your grandparents and so forth?

Dorinda Chiang:

My parents were born here. My mother was born in Parry Sound. My father was born in Chilliwack, BC. When my grandfather came over to build the railroads, when the family first came over, because of the Exclusion Act that was going on, he couldn't bring his original family from Southern China. So we actually have two families in China. So, there's a first family and a second family.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

That you still keep up with?

Dorinda Chiang:

We know the roots, yes. My uncle has been trying to trace all the roots of the family and how that is run. I was surprised, we went to Southern China a couple of years ago and actually visited our village for the first time. My aunt asked me, "Can you look up the Chinese names for my sons?" I said, "Sure I can." She goes, "I'm sure there's a register for everything there." But, you know, you go back to the village, and, there is no register. There is no formal writing for all the families, and so it's what everybody remembers, what everybody knows. There's still people in the village that are related and that can trace back only through stories.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

But they were able to help you, a little bit?

Dorinda Chiang:

I think they made up the Chinese names [both laugh] for my aunt's son. That's what they think the name should be.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

So your grandfather came in, what the 1880's, -90's?

Dorinda Chiang:

Yes. He would have come then. I remember seeing my grandmother's Head Tax certificate, and I think that was around 1900.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

And it was a large amount?

Dorinda Chiang:

Five hundred dollars.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

Exactly. When did your grandmother come, then?

Dorinda Chiang:

I know she came. She fled the village, because I had the opportunity once in China to actually go to her village, and we were actually visiting there with another family, and my aunt had asked, "Do you want to see your grandmother's house?" And so I said, "Sure."

Dorinda Chiang interview by Allison Kirk-Montgomery

3 of 33

The Law Society of Upper Canada Diversifying the Bar: Lawyers Make History Project

October 11, 2012

I didn't even know we were in the same village. It's about a half an hour drive from my grandfather's village to my grandmother's but, in those days, it would take you, probably two days to travel, because you are going over the Delta area. So, that was fascinating to see her house. But she fled China, because of the takeover. I'm not sure if it was the Japanese, or the Communists. I have to check on the history of that. But she actually left.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

So they did not know each other before?

Dorinda Chiang:

No, they met in Canada. They met in BC.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

Okay. And that was in Chilliwack.

Dorinda Chiang:

They were farmers in Chilliwack.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

Okay. And then what happened in their story?

Dorinda Chiang:

My father's family is the one that's here. I think there is seven or eight in the family. I know that there was an older uncle, but he had died when he was eighteen because of pneumonia. So, shortly after he died, the whole family came to Toronto, because they thought there were sort of better opportunities in Toronto. And so, that's where they grew up. I believe that's where he met my mother, because the Chinese community was very small, so they had picnics and get-togethers for all the Chinese Canadians at the time. And that's sort of where everybody met, knew each other. I'm sure that's where my parents had met.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

Is your dad still alive?

Dorinda Chiang:

Oh, yes.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

Yes? Did your grandfather and grandmother come with the family to Toronto, as well?

Dorinda Chiang:

My grandparents, yeah. My grandfather and grandmother that came with the whole family, and they tried farming here.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

Whereabouts?

Dorinda Chiang:

Just around Eglinton Flats area.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

Oh, my goodness.

Dorinda Chiang:

Yeah. It's quite a while to get downtown from there.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

I'm quite sure. Is that how they supported the family at the beginning?

Dorinda Chiang:

That's right.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

Now, what about your father and his siblings?

Dorinda Chiang:

My father, he grew up in Toronto, mainly, although he was born in Chilliwack. I think they left when he was about eight years old. So, they lived on McCaul Street. Chinatown was right downtown, in that particular area. They don't have a lot of fond memories, because there were not a wealthy family at all, and so they grew up. The last three—my dad, my uncle and my aunt—sort of had some assistance, from the Catholic church in terms of support. So they actually grew up with a Catholic upbringing going through school. So my dad was a graduate of St. Mike's, at U of T. They assisted him in

Dorinda Chiang interview by Allison Kirk-Montgomery

5 of 33

The Law Society of Upper Canada Diversifying the Bar: Lawyers Make History Project

October 11, 2012

getting jobs. He worked for Planters Peanuts, going through university, and worked the floats. They taught them everything for that job, how to groom yourself, how to talk, how to tip, all the basic etiquette. He managed to get into medical school and graduated in 1962, at a time when there was a colour bar at the time. So there were two Chinese at the time, two Indians, two Blacks. So that was the time period when he grew up.

My mother was a teacher. So she went through teacher's college. She was born in Parry Sound. They had the local Chinese restaurant up there. Then they moved down here, when they were older, and then my mom went to Mimico High School, and, they had a Chinese restaurant on the Lakeshore, called Nan King Garden, which is now Marina Del Ray because my grandfather sold that property in the 60's, and, so as soon as my mom had children, she quit teaching. She was a teacher.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

There couldn't have been very many Chinese-Canadian teachers either.

Dorinda Chiang:

No, there wasn't.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

Did your parents speak English as children?

Dorinda Chiang:

Yes.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

From the beginning?

Dorinda Chiang:

From the beginning, and my father went to Chinese school every night after school for thirteen years. He does not have fond memories of that [chuckles]. So, he actually wanted us to learn English, and learn it well. I remember going to Chinese school because my aunt took me when I was four years old, and they started teaching math in Chinese. But, we hadn't even been to kindergarten, so I didn't even know, what math [was], how to add, and that's what they kept teaching at the time. My dad didn't want us to get confused with the language. When we were growing up, we grew up in Etobicoke so there was a lot of prejudice, going through, in my time. So I remember going through middle school, having fights with all local immigrant children, and they would be calling me names. They wouldn't know if you were Japanese or Chinese but, because you looked like you were of Asian descent, they would be calling you all kinds of names and

Dorinda Chiang interview by Allison Kirk-Montgomery

6 of 33

The Law Society of Upper Canada Diversifying the Bar: Lawyers Make History Project

October 11, 2012

getting into fights. I remember getting into fights and then, my parents were trying to ward off some of these kids that were trying to pick on me just walking home from school. But fortunately, that ended. I have two other sisters that were in grade school at the time. They didn't experience the same thing.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

Are you the oldest?

Dorinda Chiang:

Yes, I'm the oldest of four. So my sister is a year younger than me, and then, two younger sisters.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

Why do you think that it had changed?

Dorinda Chiang:

I'm not sure, but it's for the better, right? The time just seemed to change and people just got on with their lives. And I don't know if it's more education coming in, because these were the new families that were coming in, and, so—

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

So the source of the prejudice was the new families as opposed to the white Canadian families that had been there for a while?]

Dorinda Chiang:

Yeah, for sure.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

Were there other Chinese-Canadian families there in Etobicoke?

Dorinda Chiang:

In Etobicoke, one other Chinese-Canadian family.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

So, really, you remember discrimination from an early age then?

Dorinda Chiang:

Dorinda Chiang interview by Allison Kirk-Montgomery

The Law Society of Upper Canada Diversifying the Bar: Lawyers Make History Project

7 of 33

October 11, 2012

Yes.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

And then what about high school? Did you stay in Etobicoke through high school?

Dorinda Chiang:

Yes, I did. I went to Kipling.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

What about high school?

Dorinda Chiang:

High school was fine. The school seemed to be overcrowded now that you think of the time that you were going through. But there was a whole mix of different socio-economic classes where I lived in Etobicoke. Then in Grade 10, we moved, about a kilometer away, so we were more in the South Kingsway area, more of the wealthier area of Etobicoke, and we switched schools as a result of that, as a result of the move. So, I went from Kipling Collegiate to Richview Collegiate. Richview Collegiate I found very, very snobby because if you didn't belong to these clubs, then you didn't belong. So, there was another form of discrimination at that high school, and it wasn't because of race. It was because of wealth, or what they perceived you as being, right?

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

You must have been awfully surprised having surmounted the public school discrimination, based on a different thing and then, coming to changing high schools and having to face this other kind of discrimination.

Dorinda Chiang:

Yeah. It was a different time period, but I was busy in high school. So I didn't spend a whole lot of time in high school. I had a lot of extracurricular activities. And at that time—

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

What were they?

Dorinda Chiang:

Synchronized swimming.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

Really!

Dorinda Chiang:

Yeah. I did compete at the Nationals for synchronized swimming when I was a teenager. And so we spent a lot of time in the pool. So, I've always had that focus. So the school curriculum didn't really mean much to me at all.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

And your friendships were with your sports?

Dorinda Chiang:

With my sports, yes. And a few from high school. And actually, I have a few ties from my original high school. And public school, as well.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

How did you choose synchronized swimming?

Dorinda Chiang:

We were swimmers. We love swimming.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

Your whole family?

Dorinda Chiang:

Yeah. I can't say my whole family because my dad doesn't like it but when we grew up in the Richmond Gardens area, Westway and Lawrence, there was a pool in the backyard. So we always played in the pool. We had to take lessons. Hated taking lessons but loved swimming. So all summer we'd swim in the mornings and in the afternoons. But then you ran out of lessons, because you got your bronze when you were 12 years old, and then there's nothing. So we just jumped into synchronized swimming just to fill in the gap, and a lot of us did that, and just continued swimming like that, with the club, and then just competing.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

Well, you managed to fit all that in then with your scholastics too. That was amazing.

Dorinda Chiang:

Yes, that was. It was good. We had a good time. It's good to have that focus.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

So, you graduated, and, you know, today, you have to think so far ahead what your career is going to be. What were you thinking? What were your family hoping for you?

Dorinda Chiang:

It was a difficult time for my family, because we lost my mother when she was 44, very quickly to aplastic anemia. It's a rare blood disease—one in a million, one in two million people or something like that. She was the type of woman that wasn't sick a day in her life. So it was a surprise to all of us. I was in second year university and my sister was in first year. And then my sisters were in high school so it sort of changed our focus around what we wanted to do but we kept pursuing it. So it was a year where our marks weren't so good, but we pursued it. My sister and I actually got into law school at the same time. My sister went to York and I went to Windsor. And after that year of law, she got into medicine. That's what she really wanted to do. So we sort of pushed ahead, and focused on our education.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

Very difficult. When did you decide on law school?

Dorinda Chiang:

I think it was my sister, Lisa. She was she was applying for law, so she said, "You need to apply to law, as well." I was, actually doing a year at the Institute of Child Study. So I was doing assessment and counselling. I love that, because my background from U of T was a bachelor of science in psychology. And then, I went to the Institute of Child Study and would have just had another year to finish and I loved that. That was the psychological testing, very social-related and I just found it fascinating. And I excelled in that. So, because I did so well there, I got into law school as soon as I applied.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

I'm still curious as to why you left that field to go into law.

Dorinda Chiang:

I think it was—my family was encouraging it. I had a family in Detroit, as well, my dad's sister's family. My uncle went to law school when he was mature. He was working at Hudson's and, and he was encouraging me to go into law. And this is after my mother passed away. So we were examining all kinds of law suits over the incident, and so he

Dorinda Chiang interview by Allison Kirk-Montgomery

10 of 33

The Law Society of Upper Canada Diversifying the Bar: Lawyers Make History Project

October 11, 2012

just thought that it would be a good idea for me to go to law school because there was no other family that are up here to actually give anybody any legal advice. And because we have a big family—we had doctors and dentists and teachers—there was really no lawyer in the family. Actually my dad thought it would be a good idea, as well. He encouraged it, as well. So, the key was, if you didn't try it, you wouldn't know what it was going to be like. So that's how basically how he encouraged me to try it. And if I always wanted to go back to psychology if I could, but, it's good to have this background for law.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

So, I guess you liked it.

Dorinda Chiang:

I did [both laugh]. I did, yeah. I really did. And it was funny because some of my friends in law school, that's all they wanted to do as they grew up—some of them are not practising right now.

And it's just on the basis of how much it takes out of your time and how much it takes out of the family. That has a lot to do with it.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

Especially women.

Dorinda Chiang:

That's right. It's my women friends that are not practising.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

But *you're* managing your work life balance.

Dorinda Chiang:

We have a good balance here at this firm. We're a smaller firm. So we try to run 9:00 to 5:00 hours, no weekends. A lot of the partners when I was growing up with them here, they all have cottages. So I would often take over for them in the summer anyways because they preferred to be at the cottage, and I prefer to go skiing, so we sort of have that balance.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

That's very sensible.

Dorinda Chiang:

It's very sensible, and it's very rare, because we are not like the big firms downtown. We don't keep their hours. We don't keep the billable hours.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

When did you start here?

Dorinda Chiang:

I articulated here. So I was here in 1988 when I articulated, and I stayed on for about seven years. Then I moved on with a colleague of mine, and we were downtown on Bay Street. I wanted to get that experience. We were actually a boutique firm for a lot of the Chinese Hong Kong companies that came over. And so they would need all kinds of legal assistance, be it litigation, real estate, all kinds of things. So I kind of jumped in and started. I was with my partner for about eight years.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

What was the name of your partner?

Dorinda Chiang:

It's Newton Wong and Associates.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

Okay.

Dorinda Chiang:

Then we came, but then Jim Smyth here wanted to retire in 2002. So I came back at that time.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

Did he retire?

Dorinda Chiang:

He retired in 2006.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

So your career has been very much around this firm too, and is bracketed at the beginning. So how did you get that articling position here?

Dorinda Chiang:

I interviewed here with quite a few other articling students. My resume stood out because in law school, I played hockey, and I was the captain of the women's hockey team. So I think that's [chuckles] what was on my resume. That's what impressed Gary Wright, who was the litigation lawyer who was the one that was hiring at the time.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

You were busy in law school too, then.

Dorinda Chiang:

That's right. I had to learn how to skate. We had these loggings in law school. And we had to get a sport. And they didn't have synchronized swimming [both laugh] at all, or anything to do with swimming. So I learned how to skate with one of the students, the 1976 junior champ for the Olympics.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

Who was that?

Dorinda Chiang:

]

Heather Kincairn. Her first boyfriend was Scotty Hamilton. But she used to teach all the Men's B hockey team, their skating, their power skating. She coached them. So she coached me on how to skate. So all of our Sundays were spent at the rink, doing crossovers, and trying to skate backwards. I started off in first year, and by third year I was the captain, and not because I could skate but because I could get everybody to the Bridge Tavern after our practices [laughs].

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

[laughs] Oh, essential skills.

Dorinda Chiang:

Essential skills, yes.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

That's great. How was law school as an experience?

Dorinda Chiang:

It was great. I love Windsor. Our class still stays together. We can still contact each other. It's hard to believe it's twenty five years but it's just like that. We have that ability to be able to talk to each other just like it was yesterday. And a lot of my friends are all over the place. Because we went to Windsor, there is a lot in London, Kitchener. Even though the majority are in Toronto, it's harder to stay in touch with the people in Toronto, just because of the downtown Toronto mindset.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

Very busy.

Dorinda Chiang:

That's right.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

So, how many people were in your class, about? I see there is a picture?

Dorinda Chiang:

Not very many. I can see my picture and I know it started off with a 160. I know that because my sister's study group was 160. You know, in Osgoode, they're so much bigger.

So we broke off into groups of six or seven, according to alphabet, and we studied together all three years. So those were the study groups. It was much smaller than my sister's, who went to Osgoode, but we're still very close.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

You and your sister?

Dorinda Chiang:

My sister is, and the people from there, from the picture, yeah.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

So to go back to, so you had, you experienced discrimination in high school based on social class.

Dorinda Chiang:

Yes.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

Now, what about going to university in the process? I know the times were changing but—

Dorinda Chiang:

I didn't experience any discrimination at all through university. I went to U of T, but U of T was just so big. It was just so cold. But it wasn't until the last year that I got to know people, because you had smaller study groups. Windsor was just amazing in terms of everybody getting together. And there was only one other Chinese woman in my class, Catherine.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

Was she a particular friend or no?

Dorinda Chiang:

Yeah. She is, and she's moved to England so we sort of lost touch since she's moved. But it was really fascinating. When I was going through Windsor—because I did mention my uncle in Detroit who encouraged me to go through—when I was going through law school, it was the Asian American—they formed an association called the American Citizens for Justice, and it was based on this Vincent Chin case. I don't know if you've heard of Vincent Chin, but he was he was killed in 1982. He was killed by a couple of workers in the Chrysler plant. One of them had been out of work. Vincent Chin was celebrating his stag party. He was going to get married the next day. So they were all drinking in this bar, and then they had words in the bar, and they all left after the bar. These guys followed him to where he was, it was in a McDonald's in a parking lot, and they clubbed him to death. Basically, the words were at the time they were beating him up was that, "you've taken away our jobs." That's the polite form. And so, what happened with that case is that, these two guys were fined \$3,000 dollars. It was a plea bargain; they did not spend a day in jail. So one of the reporters that was there picked up this case, and it became a movement for hate crimes because they were trying to get a new trial, under civil rights, and move this. So, my uncle was part of the Americans Citizens for Justice. He was Chinese American, but it was composed of Japanese, Korean, all kinds of Asian lawyers that were forming, to form this [association] to give themselves a better position, better bargaining power. So they would often come over and they would meet their whole board because they would come over and have dinner in Windsor, because Windsor has a Chinese-Canadian population and everybody would be coming over for a Chinese meal, for the ten-course Chinese meal, have their meeting and then go back. So, I would often join them, their meals, and met everybody and figured out what was happening with this case.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

How fascinating.

Dorinda Chiang:

And so the whole thing went national. I was on a talk show, Phil Donahue or something like that, or maybe it was pre-Phil Donahue, but it was in the 80's for sure.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

1982, you said, was the killing.

Dorinda Chiang:

That's right.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

And what's your uncle's name?

Dorinda Chiang:

Harold Leong.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

Interesting. Now, in [Canada] we had, not a death, but the anti-W5 movement.

Dorinda Chiang:

That's right.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

And that was a little bit earlier, I guess just when you were starting university, would it have been? In 1980, 1979?...It was a TV show, *W5*, and [the episode] was called, "Campus Giveaway." And it alleged that many of the spots in universities were taken by Chinese foreign students, but of course, there was lots of inaccuracies.

Dorinda Chiang:

They were all landed immigrants and Chinese-Canadians.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

Almost all of them citizens, that's right.

Dorinda Chiang:

Yes, because remember in the 60's, it opened up. There wasn't any more Exclusion Acts. People could come in with their families and started bringing in their families, so the majority were Canadian.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

Canadian-born.

Dorinda Chiang:

I think there was an article in the paper, the *Globe*, with Betty Stephenson's comments.

And that's when our Federation of Chinese Canadian Professionals started. And it was 1974, 1975 because they wanted a bigger voice. So, once again, there weren't a lot of medical students, medical doctors around, So they enlisted the assistance of the Chinese Canadian lawyers, the educators, the engineers. They just wanted a bigger—

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

Professional cohort.

Dorinda Chiang:

That's right. The whole association is non-political but it's just there to serve as a voice for the Chinese-Canadian community. It has had an interesting history and I didn't realize that it had even existed until I graduated and was working here. Because I was busy with my articles here, and then when I started working here, I was closing a lot of deals, because we do a lot of real estate, with the Chinatown lawyers downtown. And I was closing one, and there was one that was giving us a problem. So I was talking with—he's now a very good friend of mine, Joe King Lo, he went to school, law school as a mature student—[Joe] and he asked me if I was Chinese [chuckles] out of the blue.

And I said, I am Canadian but I probably look Chinese, right? And he says, "Well," and he started asking me a lot of questions, do I speak Chinese, and I thought, what does this have to do with our case? And he said, "I want you to come downtown. We're getting together. All of the Chinese Canadian lawyers are meeting downtown. Why don't you come for dinner and just meet us. So that's what I did. I went downtown, and we had a dinner in Chinatown and I met several Chinese Canadian lawyers at the time. Joe said he was part of this lawyers' group, and so we joined. We actually just used our meetings sort of as a mentoring, because people were in different facets of law and some people knew a little bit more than we did.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

Tell me about who the people were and how many there were.

Dorinda Chiang:

That's where I met Sydney Poon, actually. James Chow is another one. Newton Wong that I worked with. Eleanor Wong who worked with Jo Low's law firm, right in Chinatown. (Just trying to remember who else). There was for sure a core, seven or eight of us that continued to meet every month because, basically it was good company, great food [both laugh]. From there, Joe said, "The organization needs some help. Do you mind going to the meetings?" And I didn't know what organization it was. And that was part of the Federation of Chinese Canadian Professionals. That was the umbrella group. So I didn't realize our Association of Chinese Canadian Lawyers is part of the group of the group of the FCCP. (That's the short form of it.)

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

So, the Canadian lawyers' group is a mostly Toronto-based group, not an Ontario group?

Dorinda Chiang:

Yes.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

And so, the year now we're talking about is 1990-ish?

Dorinda Chiang:

1990, yeah. 1991, 1992.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

So you went to the meetings.

Dorinda Chiang:

I went to the meetings and got involved with the meetings. I met a lot of accountants and engineers, just a lot of other different, different people. And we still keep in touch, as well, that's how long it's been. But at the time—what project that we were doing? The FCCP were starting a project, a non-profit housing project, called Coral Place. It's out in Mississauga. It's a 108-unit building. So, at the time I started going to these meetings, they were starting to talk about these projects that they were doing as well as what they do socially, and they have a conference usually once a year where all the different

Dorinda Chiang interview by Allison Kirk-Montgomery

18 of 33

The Law Society of Upper Canada Diversifying the Bar: Lawyers Make History Project

October 11, 2012

disciplines come together and are able to share some information. So I got involved in that organization, to the point that I was the president in 1992 and 1993.

]

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

Good for you. And when did Coral Place go up?

Dorinda Chiang:

Coral Place went up in 1994. I think it would be 1997 when it might have been completely built.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

A great achievement.

Dorinda Chiang:

Yeah. It was interesting because there was there was an agreement with the organization that the land reverts back to the FCCP in 30. There was some government grant going into that project. So it's hard to believe that it's going to be not too long [until the land reverts]. It's a very successful building. That's where I met our architects. Our architects were on that project, as well. And I actually was the president of that organization in 1994, I think. We were just starting to build.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

So you were the only the second or third lawyer who was the president of that organization?

Dorinda Chiang:

That's right.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

And only the second woman.

Dorinda Chiang:

That's right. And the first one that did not speak Chinese.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

How did that play?

Dorinda Chiang interview by Allison Kirk-Montgomery

The Law Society of Upper Canada Diversifying the Bar: Lawyers Make History Project

19 of 33

October 11, 2012

Dorinda Chiang:

It was fine, for the FCCP organization, because everybody speaks English. What was really interesting is that I actually was on the board for the Heart and Stroke Foundation. We started a Chinese chapter. And I just kept getting recruited because I was sitting on the board and going to a lot of meetings and people would say, "Hey, we need help with this." So I was actually a counsel on the newsletters in Chinese for quite a while. Somebody had to point that out! But that was very interesting, because the board was the Chinese community itself for the Heart and Stroke Foundation—different walks of life, different languages. And so by that time I just remember doing one of our fundraising dinners, and everybody on the board says, "Let's just say hello in a different language." I said, "Well I can do English" [both laugh]. And they would jump in and do different dialects, Fukanese, Taiwanese all different kinds of different languages. There was eight or nine different Asian dialects that they actually spoke.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

That's fascinating.

Dorinda Chiang:

That was fascinating. And the majority of their meetings were in Cantonese. So whenever I came in, if I came in late or something, they would just all jump to English.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

So you were the only one that did not speak Chinese?

Dorinda Chiang:

That's right.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

This is very interesting. So did this change your idea of yourself, your identity, this kind of work?

Dorinda Chiang:

Oh, the community work?

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

The community work and the association with different groups of Asian communities or different Asian communities?

Dorinda Chiang interview by Allison Kirk-Montgomery

20 of 33

The Law Society of Upper Canada Diversifying the Bar: Lawyers Make History Project

October 11, 2012

Dorinda Chiang:

No, because I still think that you're—you see, I view myself as Canadian.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

Not hyphenated?

Dorinda Chiang:

Not hyphenated, no. And I don't think it matters—whatever you do you just have to be—we just keep pushing, having these goals and pushing them, pushing for an end result. What I've found to be of benefit too—I was actually on the board for the Chinese Cultural Centre, when they were building the first phase. That was in the 1990's as well. And so I think that first phase of the building—because I was sitting on that board, because I had a good command of English, and the legal system—I was actually quite helpful in terms of some of the meetings and what direction they were going to go in, because it involved in a lot of attendances. I was only sitting on a board. There was another lawyer, Brian Chu, who actually worked on that first phase really diligently and was at all the municipal meetings, and the hearings.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

Sounds complicated.

Dorinda Chiang:

It was very complicated because that was a three-party kind of an agreement, where you had to work with the community, with a private builder, and then there were some government grants, as well.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

Did you find yourself in conflict or ambivalent about some of the goals of the Chinese community?

Dorinda Chiang:

No, I haven't actually. Not personally.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

Okay. But I'm interested just to go back a little bit that you're—let's say, awakening to serious discrimination was through the American case and not particularly through the

W5 case which, during your years, was not a particularly important event, at least in your life. Is that right, or—

Dorinda Chiang:

No, it's been good because all the discrimination has ended. I just feel fortunate to live in this time period, where our firm is multicultural, right now. I have a lot of clients that are gay and married, and you would never have seen that, at the time that I was growing up. So I feel fortunate now so it doesn't really matter what colour your skin is. I just think that we are just fortunate to be very tolerant of all these diversities, in general.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

Tell me more about your particular clients and how that's changed as you've practised, or if it's changed.

Dorinda Chiang:

It really hasn't changed at all. I meet people wherever I go [chuckles] and whatever I am involved in, and we do have a lot of Asian clients, and when you do have them, you have the whole families. [chuckles] So, you're working through generations, families related, for different things. That's what I find with just the Chinese culture in Toronto.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

Of course, you started with your whole family as clients, I guess!

Dorinda Chiang:

Yes [both laugh]. Yes, I've made everyone do some estate planning [laughs], that's for sure.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

Is it mostly estate planning you do, Dorinda?

Dorinda Chiang:

I do a lot of wills and estates right now, and real estate. Yes, so that's really the focus. Some corporate, commercial, but not in huge quantities. It's really law for the typical person as opposed to the big corporate entities.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

And your clients, are they still mainly from your youth mostly or, how does the network go?

Dorinda Chiang interview by Allison Kirk-Montgomery

The Law Society of Upper Canada Diversifying the Bar: Lawyers Make History Project

22 of 33

October 11, 2012

Dorinda Chiang:

Here, if I didn't even have my own clients, it really wouldn't matter because there are so many people in this community. The firm, itself, is a 110 years old right now. So we have a lot of families that have been with the firm for years, through the McMaster McIntyre [years] and Jim Smyth, as well; it's just been ongoing. We have a lot of original wills downstairs and people can actually come back, and have asked for them.

There was one scenario where a client who was in his 80's, he had just suffered a stroke and the sons, they all used to live around here but they had moved up north and were running this marina for years. The father was very controlling. They asked whether there was any powers of attorney, by chance. I pulled out the file. All the original powers of attorney were in the file. It's just the father never told them that because he wanted control. But it was done, and so, basically we were able to get a lot of assistance to these clients and helping out the father because we had his powers of attorney.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

Which were years and years old.

Dorinda Chiang:

Years old. Done in the 70s.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

So, the firm has always been located in this area?

Dorinda Chiang:

It used to be above the Bank of Montreal, just on the corner of Dundas and Keele.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

Hasn't moved far.

Dorinda Chiang:

It was there in 1928, I think, to 1984, and we bought the building in 1984.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

Fascinating.

Dorinda Chiang:

Dorinda Chiang interview by Allison Kirk-Montgomery

The Law Society of Upper Canada Diversifying the Bar: Lawyers Make History Project

23 of 33

October 11, 2012

Yeah, so it's always been here.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

The year that you were called to the Bar, in 1989, that was Tiananmen Square too.

Dorinda Chiang:

That's right.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

Any reflections on that, or in your family, what—

Dorinda Chiang:

I just remember that because I was involved with the—we sort of celebrated the anniversaries of that particular June 4th date after that with the Federation. So there was always a lot of talk about that particular incident. And some of my friends have gone back to China right after that incident. They would stand in the square and tell me their experiences. But I did go to Beijing a few years ago, and in standing in that square itself, there's a lot of security cameras all over the place, and the army are surrounding. If you do anything they are right there. It's fascinating, how it works.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

I could imagine that, and how different it is now. You mentioned the head tax that your grandfather paid, I guess for himself but also for...

Dorinda Chiang:

I don't know what my grandfather did. I don't know if he did, because I think he was able to come over because he was working here.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

Yes, for your grandmother anyway.

Dorinda Chiang:

For my grandmother.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

What about the redress movement that started about 1984? Were you—

Dorinda Chiang interview by Allison Kirk-Montgomery

The Law Society of Upper Canada Diversifying the Bar: Lawyers Make History Project

24 of 33

October 11, 2012

Dorinda Chiang:

We haven't done anything—from a personal point of view we haven't done anything with that. My grandmother died a few years before any of the redress was really discussed—my grandmother died when she was 96. There is a lot of longevity there.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

That's good.

Dorinda Chiang:

So, there's really no redress for her. I know that there are some Chinese-Canadian associations, particularly dealing with [the head tax issue]—they're very politically-focused in dealing with that particular issue, but the organizations that I dealt with are not necessarily—

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

You mentioned that they're basically non-political. So, what would you say was their main function?

Dorinda Chiang:

Mainly a networking association, and the projects are mainly social. We've got that housing project, and we also have an education foundation. So, that's a charitable arm of the organization as well, and it provides scholarships and bursaries to students who are in need. There is an award of merit given to outstanding Chinese Canadians and that's pretty well done, I think, on a yearly basis. So it's mainly just serving a voice, bringing the community together. But if there are any political needs, then there are some organizations that people could go to.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

Okay. And are you still involved with the Federation?

Dorinda Chiang:

Yes, actually. I am still part of the Association of Chinese Canadian Lawyers. And we do a lot of dragon boat racing [both laugh]. So we've done very well. Our organization, the FCCP itself, has two teams.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

Good for you.

Dorinda Chiang interview by Allison Kirk-Montgomery

The Law Society of Upper Canada Diversifying the Bar: Lawyers Make History Project

25 of 33

October 11, 2012

Dorinda Chiang:

Not a lot of medals. My partner's got a lot of medals in his office. I should show you a little bit later.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

I don't see any in your office.

Dorinda Chiang:

There's not in mine, no. But they're in his. And so that's really what keeps us going. When we say we're on the dragon boat team, it's not just lawyers, there's doctors, there's physiotherapists, chiropractors. They all belong to the FCCP, and so it's just a way of getting out and doing something together.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

So your professional links, across professions, have been really important in your career and your life too?

Dorinda Chiang:

Yes.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

That's interesting as well. I wanted to ask you, when you were growing up, had you heard about Greta Wong Grant, and Kew Dock Yip, the first—

Dorinda Chiang:

Kew Dock Yip was a familiar name just because my father had mentioned his name, because he was the only [Chinese Canadian] lawyer, I think, in Toronto. Greta Wong Grant, I didn't really hear about but she's not from Toronto.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

London, yes.

Dorinda Chiang:

Yeah. So and I think that's the inspiration too for my dad to encourage me to go into law because there wasn't a lot of lawyers that were of Chinese descent. I think they used Kew Dock Yip whenever they had to.

Dorinda Chiang interview by Allison Kirk-Montgomery

The Law Society of Upper Canada Diversifying the Bar: Lawyers Make History Project

26 of 33

October 11, 2012

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

Your parents did?

Dorinda Chiang:

Yeah.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

Yeah, of course, and I guess your uncle, would be, a lawyer, later, because he was younger.

Dorinda Chiang:

That's right.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

Okay. And I think you mentioned on the phone, Wailan Low?

Dorinda Chiang:

That's right. That was fun. We had a couple of cases together when I was downtown. We settled a couple of cases and so I got to know her while she was a lawyer. When she was being considered as a judge, then we all supported her. We wanted to see a Chinese-Canadian judge, basically. And her credentials are amazing. She's a hard worker.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery

And she's on the Diversifying the Bar list, of course.

Dorinda Chiang:

That's right. She was really a pioneer in litigation because she was a female litigator at a time that there weren't a lot of litigators.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery

That were women.

Dorinda Chiang:

Yeah, let alone of Chinese descent too.

Dorinda Chiang interview by Allison Kirk-Montgomery

The Law Society of Upper Canada Diversifying the Bar: Lawyers Make History Project

27 of 33

October 11, 2012

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

It's interesting that the first Chinese-Canadian woman lawyer, Gretta Wong Grant, when she was asked about discrimination and what constrained her career, she said it was more that she was female than that she was Chinese-Canadian. She felt it especially when she came to Toronto, that there, what she could do was very limited, just by the fact that of being female. How do you feel about gender, and your career, how it's shaped your career?

Dorinda Chiang:

When I went to law school, it was just the announcement that we were 50/50, 50% women. Yeah, so that was just the start of it. And I can understand [Gretta Wong Grant's point of view] because I worked downtown on purpose just to give me another dimension, to see what it was like to be in amongst the big firms. And I really learned a lot, when I was downtown, with Newton Wong and Associates.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

Why? What did you learn?

Dorinda Chiang:

Just how the big firms sort of worked, it's a different mentality. Everybody was downtown, working constantly. But it was basically an old boys club, I still found, when I was downtown. Preference was given to males. And, I think, and as I said, a lot of my friends are not in it any more, just because they couldn't keep up with the demands of the big firms. They had to move out for their families.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

Is that why you moved out too, partly?

Dorinda Chiang:

Moved out from downtown?

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

From downtown. Not particularly your family, but the old boys club aspect of it?

Dorinda Chiang:

Yeah, I was never part of it because I was a woman. So, I didn't even consider, when I was articling, the Bay Street [firms], because I didn't think that I would even have a chance.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

It's interesting, because the way you describe it, it's like a completely different world than where you are out here.

Dorinda Chiang:

I think it is. And I hoping that's changing now, with more women, and more women in the workforce in the bigger firms. I'm hoping that they can find time for their families.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

They still do talk about the glass ceiling at the top levels of the profession, or at least in those areas, but maybe not in smaller firms.

Dorinda Chiang:

Right.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

Interesting. Well, you've mentioned some of the issues about your life outside the law; your dragon boat racing, and you have a partner and stepchildren. Your choice of being here is about your work-life balance, as well.

Dorinda Chiang:

That's right. When Jim Smyth retired in 2006, that's when I became a partner, and same with Alan Cain. We sort of joined in as partners and just want to keep that family firm scenario running. Since then we've hired on a few of the younger generation lawyers, because we always have succession in mind, and try to keep the balance and try to keep the clients of the firm who've been around for years.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

And, speaking of succession, how long do you think you will be here?

Dorinda Chiang:

I'm not sure. I know as, as long as I'm able, right? I don't really have any sort of age restrictions.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

May I ask your age?

Dorinda Chiang:

I'm 52. My father's still practising medicine.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

How old is he?

Dorinda Chiang:

Seventy-eight. My uncle is still practising. My father just gave up obstetrics maybe two years ago, I said, you need more sleep, right? [Allison laughs]. My uncle is 80. He is still a dentist. He is still practising. His daughter is also practising, they're in the same office. My sister is in the same office with my dad, in medicine. So, you know, sort of keeping the succession going in and of itself.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

Are you still the only lawyer?

Dorinda Chiang:

I'm the only lawyer, yes [Allison laughs]. It gets fun sometimes [both laugh].

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

And have you ever taken Mandarin lessons, Mandarin or Cantonese?

Dorinda Chiang:

When we were in China, we bought the "Rosetta Stone" [software language course] for Mandarin [Allison laughs], because we figured we could do better shopping if we could [both laugh] speak a few more words. I always thought—all my friends when I was with the FCCP, and sometimes they would revert to Chinese and just assumed I would understand, right? And a few of them said, "Oh, you should learn some Cantonese," but and I did pick up a lot of terms, like when you're being introduced, what does "deed" mean, what does "money" mean, so I could tell what people were saying, right? But I never really did take any formal lessons.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

Maybe because your family dialect is a dialect.

Dorinda Chiang interview by Allison Kirk-Montgomery

The Law Society of Upper Canada Diversifying the Bar: Lawyers Make History Project

30 of 33

October 11, 2012

Dorinda Chiang:

That's right.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

Do you think that would be part of it?

Dorinda Chiang:

Yeah, it's completely different too, right? The dialect can't understand the Cantonese, right? It's that different. The Chinese from that delta area, they are—I think the term is Taishanese—they speak a dialect. But when you see China now, you really have to know about Mandarin. And that is the language to learn. So if you're going to learn anything at this point, it would be Mandarin. So a lot of my friends are having lessons in Mandarin.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

But you're not.

Dorinda Chiang:

No.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

How would your career have been different, do you think, if you had spoken Mandarin, let's say?

Dorinda Chiang:

I don't know if it would be that different as it is.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

The same clients.

Dorinda Chiang:

The same clients, yes. I've had staff, sometimes that I've hired, that have spoken fluent Cantonese and Mandarin.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

And this would really assist you with your clients?

Dorinda Chiang:

It assisted me when I was downtown, to have a Cantonese-speaking and Mandarin-speaking.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

But not so much here?

Dorinda Chiang:

Not here, no.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

Is it because it's a generational set of clients here? A different generation partly?

Dorinda Chiang:

Yeah, a different area, too. I think if I was more up in Markham or downtown it would be a little bit—you would have to have a little bit more of that language.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

So more of your clients here are not Chinese-speaking.

Dorinda Chiang:

That's right. Everybody speaks English. The occasional one—if you have a mother, a grandmother that's living in the household. But we do have a Cantonese-speaking lawyer here.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

Sounds fascinating. Your law firm sounds fascinating.

Dorinda Chiang:

Yeah. We've got Polish, Romanian [both laugh], so we have a whole range of diversity within this firm.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

Dealing with immigration issues very much?

Dorinda Chiang interview by Allison Kirk-Montgomery

The Law Society of Upper Canada Diversifying the Bar: Lawyers Make History Project

32 of 33

October 11, 2012

Dorinda Chiang:

No, no, we don't do immigration.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

No, okay. Is there anything else that you would like to add, Dorinda? I should have asked you probably many questions I'll think of later.

Dorinda Chiang:

No, I can't think of anything right now.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

All right. Well, thank you very much for your time. It was very fascinating.

Dorinda Chiang:

It's very interesting to bring out a lot of the historical events. It's hard to believe that time flies but it's a very interesting history in Toronto here.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

I encourage you to record your uncles and aunts and father.

Dorinda Chiang:

Thank you. That's a great idea [laughs]. Thank you.

Allison Kirk-Montgomery:

Thank you.

-end-